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BY JOHN F. GENUNG

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THE MAN WITH THE PITCHER

AND HIS STORY

RETOLD FOR THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

BY

JOHN F. GENUNG

"And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, 'Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him.'"

NEW YORK
THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY
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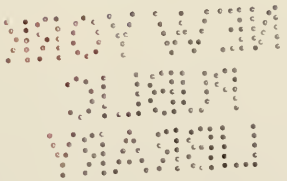
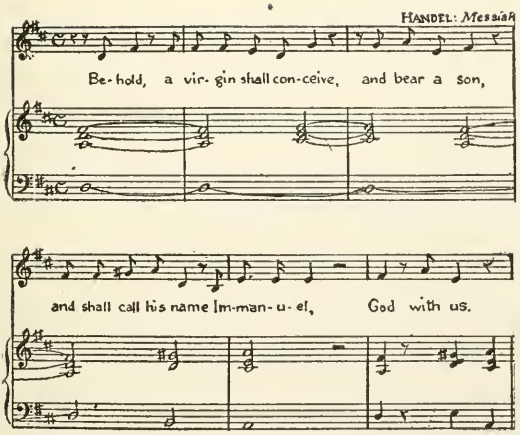
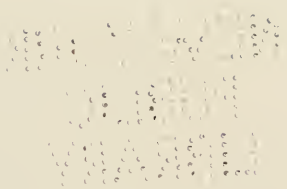




"I never realized God's birth before—
How He grew likest God in being born.
This time I felt like Mary, had my babe
Lying a little on my breast like hers."

BROWNING: *Pompilia.*



Preface

WITH the personal history of the man with the pitcher this little story is not concerned. He emerges into one fleeting moment of contact with our Lord's activity and then disappears; that is all. But like the man with the hoe, of whom we have all read, he is a representative. He speaks for the great unnamed body of the common people, who heard Jesus gladly, and who beyond the titled and the rich saw him as he was. It was to them, the poor in heart, that the real inner kingdom of heaven had earliest and

readiest access. And the story that the man with the pitcher tells leads our thoughts back to the earliest moment of all, the first Christmas season; when a song of heaven was sung and a Child came with music to earth, and when only a few, some shepherds faithful to their charge in the night, an old man waiting for the realization of a secret presage, and a venerable prophetess long acquainted with fast and prayer, were there to welcome him. It tells us of the music of divine childhood, as it sounded to the few who had ears to hear.

That Obed colors his story with the speech and feeling of the twentieth century need not offend those who are aware that the heart has its own ver-

nacular, on which the mutations of time and race and country have no power; it is no more an anachronism than the circumstance that he speaks in the English language at all.

The Man with the Pitcher and His Story

I

"YES; I knew him," replied Obed, the Bethlehemite, to a company of travelers who, having heard St. Paul preach in the provinces, had come up to Jerusalem to inquire about the wonderful man who had been crucified there. Obed was known as the Bethlehemite from his birthplace; though for many years he had lived in Jerusalem, where in his modest little shop in the marketplace the travelers found him. "I

knew him," he continued, "merely as others did, the common folk who loved him. I used to see him when he came up from Galilee to Jerusalem, as he did at feast times; and we always listened to him gladly, he seemed so like one of us."

"Was he then so familiar with common people?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; though he never made any difference between classes. But somehow it seemed, to any who listened to him, as if his words were meant for them."

Obed paused, but with a kindling light in his eyes, as if some specially cherished memory were stirred within him.

"You seem to have had more than

a casual knowledge of him," one ventured to remark. "Were you a secret disciple, like the counselor Nicodemus, or a personal friend, like Lazarus of Bethany?"

"I would not claim to have been either," he answered with a gently deprecating air. "I had, however, some special reasons for interest in him. You see," he continued, as if to explain, "my mother had known him as a child; and besides, sometimes when he was in the city he lodged at the house where for some years I was in service. Once he had a supper—his last parting meal with his disciples, in fact—in a large upper room of that house."

"Ah, we have just come from there;

it is still the meeting-place of the sect. It was there indeed that we were directed to you. We were seeking information, and were told that you had some interesting recollections of him. Did you serve at that table?"

"Oh, no; they were by themselves. It was my duty that day, however, as I like to recall, to prepare the room and to guide the company to the place."

"We remember to have heard how he sent disciples to engage it of a man whom he said they would meet. You, then, were that man—the man with the pitcher?"

"Yes; I did not know why I had been sent on a duty so unusual; for only maid-servants are wont to carry

water. But it was a sign agreed upon with the master of the house, who was the good Teacher's friend."

"You said just now that your mother had known him in childhood. Is she living? and may we question her about him?"

"I wish you could hear about him from her. She knew his mother, too, and had some wonderful reminiscences of his infancy, which she never tired of telling. But she died two years ago."

"You must remember some of the things she was so fond of recounting?"

"Yes; many things," answered Obed, as the kindling light came again into his face. "Some so vivid that I seem to have seen them myself; but that

could not be, for I was too young. I saw him but rarely before his ministry began; but I always felt a peculiar bond of connection with him, from the fact that we two were born on the same day."

"What a coincidence; then you and he were children together?"

"We were infants in the same town, and, indeed, under the same roof, for a while. Then one night—but I am getting ahead of the story that my mother used to tell."

"Tell us from the beginning; we have heard but vaguely of his infancy."

"I fear it is not a good place here in the market; and it is time to close the shop. Come with me to my house;

it is not far from here. We will break bread together and talk."

"But we are not of your nation," objected one. "Are we not intruding on that exclusiveness which your race so proudly cherishes?"

"We have learned more hospitable things," smiled Obed, "since he was among us."

So they accompanied Obed to his humble dwelling, which was in the newer part of the city called Bezetha; and there, after refreshments served, in the leisurely manner of the East he recounted his story.

II

"FIFTY years ago," began Obed, as if the reminiscence were his own, "the inhabitants of Bethlehem were a poor and hard-working people; but they were proud of their little town and its traditions. No other town except Jerusalem had been so distinguished. All round them were reminders of this. There were the fields where Boaz had reaped and Ruth had gleaned; the glens and uplands where the boy David had tended his sheep; the family seat where Samuel had found and anointed the man after

God's own heart; the well where the three mighty men risked almost certain death to draw water for their king. There also, as a prophet had said, a greater king would some time be born, the Ruler and Shepherd for whom the nation longed. You may be sure all this, though now the mold of antiquity was on it, would not be wholly forgotten. Here and there an earnest soul was still hoping and praying; though none could surmise, among so lowly a folk, how the prophecy might come true.

"My parents were both of this devout and steadfast spirit. My father, who was by occupation a shepherd, was comparatively well to do, as matters went in Bethlehem; he owned a

house on an angle of the town wall, from the roof of which one could look across the meadows to the pasture land near the field of Boaz, where he pastured and folded his sheep. At the time my story opens my mother, not yet a mother, was expecting soon to become one.

"Late in the morning of that day—it was in the spring season, when the nights were mild and balmy — my father started for the sheep range, intending to spend the night in the open with the flock. As he crossed the market-place on his way to the gate, crowds of travelers were coming in, and pressing toward the khan, the court-yard of which opened at one corner of the market-place.

"'The inn will be overfull tonight,' he said to himself; 'I have never seen the town so crowded. This long-delayed census of King Herod's makes us realize how many there are all over our land who trace their ancestry to the old families of Bethlehem. I wonder if there are any left of King David's line.'

"As he thus mused, now near the gate, there entered a couple who immediately arrested his attention. The man was of nearly middle age, evidently an artisan, but with the look of nature's nobleman in his face. On the donkey which he was driving was seated a young woman, whose countenance seemed to my father the most impressive that he had ever seen.

There was an indescribable look of purity and depth in it which he could observe only with a feeling of awe. As they passed him he noticed in the fringes of their robes the thread which was the token of the Davidic house. He noticed also that for the woman the term of motherhood was near.

" 'This is no place for her,' he said to himself. 'David was in honor here, but David's descendants will scarce find where to lay their heads.'

"He went on out of the gate toward the fields; but all the afternoon that deep woman-face was before his mind; and the sight of the Davidic fringe, so long unfamiliar, set his thoughts into a sweet tumult of reminiscence and musing.

III

"AS my father and his companions sat together under the stars that night, there was unwonted silence in the party. Each man seemed absorbed in his own thought. One of them, usually the most talkative, beguiled the time for a while with playing simple melodies on his shepherd's flute; then, turning rather abruptly to my father, said, 'Why are we all so silent tonight? It seems to me just as if all our hearts were full of something that we cannot frame our tongues to say.'

"'I think that is so,' replied my

father. 'It seems as if we were all expecting something, and not knowing what it was. And yet my heart is not cast down but uplifted, as if something great and good were coming to us.'

"'Little reason to expect anything good,' retorted the other, whose mind was inclined to dwell on the dark side of things. 'What good, for instance, can come of this census they are taking? It only means taxes and hardship, and the poorest fare the worst. My heart has been bitter all day as I thought of the heavy weight of tyranny that this Roman Empire has bound on all the world; and Herod is only the Romans' tool, with cruelty on his own account thrown in to make the evil more galling. Be-

sides, what right has a poor shepherd, of all men, to hope for release?'

"'As good a right as any one, when you come to that,' replied my father. 'In fact, all day I have somehow felt glad that I am a shepherd, here on these Bethlehem hills. Don't you remember how God has honored our humble calling?'

"'Why, no; tell me about it.'

"'Ever since I came out here this morning my mind has been running on the ancient stories of our place. I have been thinking of Ruth, who many centuries ago, out of love to our God and our people, came from a heathen land and cast in her lot with us. That field just over the wall yonder, they say, was the very place where she

gleaned. I have been thinking of King David, too—he was her great-grandson, you know—and of how much our nation had hoped from his house. He was a shepherd-boy in these very fields; and the prophet Samuel selected him before all his stalwart brothers to be God's chosen king. The glory of king and kingdom is all gone now, in this dreadful reign of the Idumean Herod; but somehow, all day long my heart has been uplifted with a strange feeling of expectancy, and I have found myself many times repeating some words I have heard read from a prophet, "the sure mercies of David." '

" 'Sure mercies, indeed; what could have put you in such a mood?'

" 'I hardly know,' replied my father,

'unless it were something I saw as I crossed the market-place this morning.' And he went on to describe the crowds, and the pair with the thread of the Davidic house in their fringe, and the wonderful woman-face.

"'Alas, you are letting your fancies run away with you,' said the other. 'We might as well dismiss those old dreams; how can they ever come true?' He relapsed into silence, and the two sat long with their thoughts.

"'And yet,' he resumed, after a while, with a deprecating tone, as if he were half ashamed to confess to a touch of sentiment, 'I also have a story. It amounts to no more than yours; but while we have been so moody all the evening it has been run-

ning in my mind, just as a flute-melody will sometimes haunt me all night.'

"'What is your story?'

"'Only about a rather remarkable thing that occurred about six months ago in one of the priest cities off beyond Jerusalem. My wife's cousin, who lives there, and who is now on a visit to my family, was present at the time, and saw and heard. She was at a family gathering in the house of a neighbor of hers, an elderly woman named Elizabeth, who quite beyond the natural age had given birth to a son. This gathering indeed was the baby's consecration party. And there was a singular thing connected with it. Her husband Zacharias, a venerable

priest whom all the neighbors loved and revered, had been serving in his course in the Temple nearly a year before, and when he came home he was unable to speak. From then until his child was born he could communicate only by signs or in writing, and the neighbors were saddened to see him so afflicted; they thought God was punishing him for some lapse in his holy office. Neither he nor Elizabeth, however, had seemed cast down by it; on the contrary, a wonderful peace was in their faces all the while Elizabeth was awaiting her motherhood. A young kinswoman of hers had been visiting her for three months, and the two seemed to be sharing in a great joy about which they were silent; but

a little before the child was born the kinswoman had gone back to her home in the north.

" 'Well, the consecration ceremony came, and the neighbors, my wife's cousin among them, came to the house to rejoice with the parents; and there was Zacharias unable to say a word. All the women were eager to have the child named Zacharias after him, for he was much loved in all the village; but the mother insisted that it should be called John, a name strange to the family. So they made signs to the father; and he, too, taking a tablet, wrote that the name should be John. While they wondered at this, suddenly Zacharias began to speak in a clear, fervid tone, uttering a prophecy on

the child, like one of the old seers risen again. The beauty of his words, our cousin said, was like the voice of God.'

" 'Could your visitor recall what he said?'

" 'Not all; but one thing she remembered was that the child was to be a herald, going before the Lord to make ready his ways, and give knowledge of salvation to his people. That is what has set me thinking; I hardly know what to make of it.'

" 'Neither do I,' answered my father. 'The priest is, of course, a Levite, and no great leader is promised from that tribe.'

" 'No; that is it. I am not versed in prophecy, as you are, but every one expects that our race's great deliver-

ance—if it ever comes—will come from Judah.'

" 'But is that all she can remember?'

" 'One other thing she recalled, which puzzles me all the more. At the beginning of his rhapsody the priest said that the Lord had raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. Now how can that be, if this child is the son of a Levite priest?"

" 'How, indeed?' replied my father, half musingly, as he recalled what he had seen in the morning; 'yet how remarkably the house of David comes into his prophecy. Well, after all, it may be only a father's fond joy over a child born out of reasonable season; and the priest may have been beside

himself at the sudden recovery of speech. No; there is nothing in it to feed our belief.'

"'Nay, but the cousin relates a strange thing about his long dumbness. It appears, as Elizabeth told her afterward, that an angel had foretold the child's birth to Zacharias as he was ministering at the altar, and had inflicted the dumbness just because he would not believe. It was a sign that his promise would come true. That was why, all through that year, there was such joy and peace in the house; they were awaiting the thing that should come.'

"'An angel's visit,' was my father's comment. 'How wonderful such a thing must be, even to a holy priest;

a message straight from the far courts of heaven; yet how dreadful, like a touch of God's wrath.' And silence fell upon them again.

"While the two shepherds thus conversed, the others reclining near and listening, the evening advanced toward midnight. The sky was cloudless and the stars were bright, but the slender new moon had gone down. Suddenly a strange pulsation of awe ran through the company, almost paralyzing yet leaving their faculties the clearest of the clear; and they could not tell why; but it seemed as if somehow the air were charged with life and light and music, not yet visible or audible, but ready to break forth and flood the world. Then as they sat well-nigh

stupefied with a nameless fear, the mystic influence seemed to concentrate itself into the form of a man; and in words wherein was a music beyond that of human utterance the form spoke to them: 'Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.'

"The shepherds could only stare in stupid wonder; but some covered their faces.

"The voice went on: 'For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'

"As the men looked at each other in amazement, doubting whether the scene was real or an illusion, and whether they themselves were in earth or heaven, the angel went on to give

them a sign by which they could know his words were true; they would find the babe, he said, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

"Then all at once it seemed as if the life and light and music with which the air had been charged burst forth in a vast reverberation of joy, and they could half discern mystic presences all round them singing, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace; good-will toward men.'

"In a few minutes all was silent again, and the night was as before.

"My father was the first to recover some degree of composure. 'Let us go and see,' he said; and going into Bethlehem, still too amazed to speak,

they entered the grotto where my father was wont to stall his flock in winter, and whence he had only a few days before led them afield; and there they found it even as the angel had said. There was the pair he had seen so travel-weary in the morning; there on the garments were the tokens of kingly descent; there greeted them the wonderful face, more wonderful still in divine motherhood. The infant was lying asleep in the manger, wrapped in swaddling bands as the angel had said; while by the side of it the mother was reclining on a rough pallet of straw, which the husband, who was a carpenter, had fitted up from such scant material as he could find.

IV

"THE other shepherds, as they returned to their duties in the fields, were stirred to loud praise and exultation. The talkative one, especially, who had related to my father the story of the birth of John, found his voice again, and for several days he was full of theories to account for the wonderful events of the night; but gradually the influence of them evaporated. He could not see how the birth of a child to such humble wayfarers, whom nobody knew, could have any effect on the crooked order of things in the

government, and after a little the impression of the night passed away like a dream. But my father, to whom the event was sacred beyond words, was reticent. All that he had heard or read of the prophecies of old, and all the promises and hopes clustering round the little town's annals, came to his mind with a vividness and power never realized before, and he could only be still and think. One person, however, must know all and share in the wonder of it, my mother, for she, like him, had looked and longed for the redemption of Israel.

"So as soon as he had tried to put things in order a little in the grotto he went straight to his house, which was not far away; where he found that

motherhood had visited that place, too. It was on that same night, as I have told you, that I was born.

" 'What has happened to bring you from the field at this hour?' she said to him, as he entered the room where she lay happy with the babe in her arms. 'Did some impulse prompt you to come and see your boy?'

" 'Blessed be the Lord, who has given us this boy,' replied my father, 'and who has supported you in your trial. But a greater event than this, and holier, has brought me into Bethlehem; a thing which I can hardly calm myself to tell you. O wife, the ancient promise to our town is coming to pass!' And he went on to tell her, as well as he could for the awe that

still possessed him, what had taken place.

" 'Wonderful news,' said she; 'but, husband, it is as if I had already heard it. All day I have felt, before my own summons came, that a great blessing had fallen upon our town; and the sense of it was a deep peace to me, so great that my own labor-pangs were as nothing. "On earth peace,"—how true is the angel song you heard. I can hardly describe the blessedness of it: it was as if a holier, purer mother-heart were somewhere very nigh, beating by the side of mine, and bidding me good cheer. Early in the evening I had gone to the house-top to enjoy the mild and fragrant air; and several hours I reclined there

under the stars, as you too were doing in the fields. Then, toward midnight, I was aware of that strange thing of which you spoke, as if the air were charged with divine life; only it seemed after a little to draw toward our grotto, which made me wonder, for I knew you had left it empty. Then later I saw the light flooding all the field where you were, and there came to my ears a strain of singing, surpassingly sweet and sublime, as if the air and the sky had formed themselves to music. The words, however, I could not make out.'

" 'And all this night, wife, the town has been asleep; and to none has its visitation been made known except to a few shepherds. It overwhelms me

with the sense of my humility. Who are we, wife, to be so favored with the first tidings?'

" 'So, too, I am moved to ask. What can such common folk as we do, when a prince is born among us? It looks as if God meant us to give him welcome.'

"Here attention to their new-born babe and some duties of the house interrupted their talk a little, but both were busy with the great thoughts which the night had awakened. It was now near dawn.

" 'Husband,' at length called my mother from her couch, 'have you learned who these parents are, and where they come from?'

" 'I could not learn much; but the

man told me they were from a town called Nazareth, four or five days' journey north of here.'

" 'Far in the north; that must be in Galilee.'

" 'Yes; their province, the man said, is Galilee; but they had to report here for the census, because of their connection with the house of David.'

" 'Galilee; that brings something to my mind. Do you remember those words we heard read not long ago from the prophet Isaiah, about that region beyond the sea, Galilee of the Gentiles, where the people that sat in darkness saw a great light? It made a great impression on me, because the passage goes on to describe a wonderful child that was born, and the gov-

ernment would be upon his shoulder.'

"'Yes; I remember; and it puzzled me much, for you know the promise of another prophet in which we Bethlehemites take such pride says that the leader of Israel is to come from our little town.'

"'We have been doubting, too, you know,' replied my mother, 'how it was possible for one of David's line to be born here, when the whole family seems to have run out. But do you not see? if these are from Galilee, both predictions have come true.'

"'Surely enough; and the descendant of David, whom but for this census we could not have found, is born after all in the home town.'

"'Husband, my heart troubles me

for this pair with their new-born infant, so far from home, so scantily supplied. They ought not to stay in that damp, chilly grotto, with only stalls and a manger for furnishing.'

"'But there is no room for them at the inn.'

"'No; nor is it a fitting place. I am thinking: can we not make room for them here? Our house is small, but ample for our simple needs, and theirs. They must remain here many weeks at least; for there are the eight days till circumcision, and the forty days till purification. Husband, how can we bear to see our little one in the comfort of a home while that other babe is denied it? Let us get them here.'

" 'With all my heart, dear wife. I have been asking myself how we could help them.'

"So, about five or six days after, as soon as it would do for the young mother to be active, the change in lodging was made; thus it came about that this holy child and I were infants together under the same roof. It was far beyond the dawn of my memory; but somehow I have felt the wonder and the blessedness of it all my days."

"How proud you must be of such a distinction," remarked one of the listeners to Obed.

"Oh, no, not that," answered Obed; "not pride, but wonder and worship. It is as if he, though poor himself, and a little brother of the poor, had been

my Lord and King from the day of his birth. So he was also in my parents' house. For the music of the angels' song and the sacredness of that midnight visit to the manger never faded from their hearts."

V

"TWO or three days after the guests had come to our home," Obed resumed after a pause, "on the eighth day after the child's birth, the day which by our race's immemorial custom is set apart for naming and consecration, the simple ceremony for the two families took place. As the man and his wife were travelers and far from acquaintances, there was no occasion to make a neighborhood party of it, as the priest's wife had done for her baby six months before. My mother told me of it only once; she could not bring

herself to invade the memory of the scene with idle words. The pair bowed before their child in worship, as if they were admitted to the holy of holies; and the light of an unspeakable joy yet of a well-nigh overwhelming sense of responsibility beamed in both their faces. When it came to naming their child, the husband, whose name was Joseph, waited for the young mother to speak. 'His name shall be called Jesus,' she said in a tone of solemn awe, as if speaking not of herself but by authority; and he, glancing at her with a momentary look of satisfied recognition, replied in the same manner of quoting, 'Thou shalt call his name Jesus.' My mother learned afterward that to both of them,

to the woman, whose name was Mary, many months before, and to the husband more recently, an angel had revealed the unique greatness of his birth, and had given the name. About other circumstances connected with the child Mary was reticent; for she was a woman of meditative temperament, and said little of her more sacred experiences. There was evidently some holy mystery in her life which brought her very near to God; and her demeanor toward her child, as my mother often noticed, was more that of a worshiper than of a mother."

"This name which the angel had announced," remarked one of the listeners, "must have had a peculiar significance; can you explain it?"

"In the name Jesus, which is the form in your Greek tongue," replied Obed, "it does not appear; but in our Hebrew speech, from which it is taken, it is Joshua, a not uncommon name which has figured honorably in our race's history. Not for its history, however, nor for its family connections, but for its intrinsic meaning, it had been announced by the angel as a name chosen in heaven. My father learned about it afterward from Joseph, who one day in the fields told him what the angel had said. You must know that a great many of our names, and especially royal names of King David's line, contain the name of the God we worship; this one does also, and with it a word which means

'to save.' The angel had said to Joseph, 'Thou shalt call his name Joshua, or Jesus, for it is he that shall save his people from their sins.' As Joseph told him this, in the very field where he himself had received an angelic announcement, my father recalled vividly what had been said that evening under the stars, 'Unto you this night is born a Saviour.' That is what the name means; it points to the deliverance that our race has so long looked for."

"But this deliverance itself," urged the listener, "what signs of it can be seen, to answer to all these wonders of announcement?"

"That is what those who love him have been gradually learning," an-

swered Obed. "Neither my parents nor the parents of the child could understand it at the time; nay, all through his infancy and youth they could only follow the child's growing life with bewildered wonder, as if he were far above them; and many times they had to revise their thoughts of him. So it is with us who since his death deem him still alive and call him Lord and King. The depth and reality of the salvation his name prophesies go infinitely beyond us, but we draw life from him every day."

"But why have so few leaders and great ones learned his worth?" asked one.

"That question has often troubled us of the common people," answered

Obed; "but at one of his discourses at which I happened to be present I once heard him utter these wonderful words in prayer: 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes.' So it has always been: the simple-hearted folk loved him."

"But we are interrupting your story of his infancy. Pray go on."

"It is not interrupting to lead my story to this fact," said Obed, as the light kindled again in his face; "for as I recall my mother's sweet reminiscences of that time, this is what stands out most clearly. During the days that intervened between the naming and the presentation in the Temple

the two mothers, in the seclusion of one home, were becoming acquainted with each other. To Mary, after her enforced journey with its crowds and anxieties, this month of domestic peace was a welcome refuge and rest which she accepted with simple trust as all in the providing care of God; to my mother it was as if her spirit were wonderfully opened to divine influence, as if the ideal greatness of motherhood, and especially of godlike infancy, were revealed to her in her own home in all the plainness yet beauty of humanity.

"When, after the forty days of seclusion, the two mothers took their journey together to the Temple, six miles away, they attracted little atten-

tion, of course, among the mothers who from all over Judea were continually coming on such errands. My parents, whose means permitted, could spare a lamb from the flock for the consecration offering; but Joseph and Mary could bring only the pair of doves which was the offering of the very poor, and so they earned from the officiating priests merely the scant recognition accorded to the poor.

"That was all they looked for, however; so it was a great surprise to them, when the ritual was concluded and they turned away from the altar, to see a venerable man approach and with devout fervency as of one to whom a long cherished hope is realized take the babe from Mary's arms and pronounce

over it a prophetic blessing, praising God that his eyes had seen the light of the Gentiles and the glory of Israel. As they listened in speechless wonder he turned and blessed Mary; but withal predicted in obscure words that the child was destined to be spoken against, and that she herself would suffer. Mary learned later that this man's name was Simeon, that he was one of the obscure pious ones who were looking for the consolation of his race, and that he had had a prophecy that he would not see death until his eyes had beheld the Lord's Christ. Nor was this the end of the day's surprises. While they still lingered in the Temple, making ready to return home, a very aged prophetess

named Anna, who was well known as a constant worshiper in the Temple, came in and recognized the child with reverent thanksgiving, and as we heard afterward, spoke of him to all the common folk who in Jerusalem were looking and longing for God's promised redemption.

"You may well believe it was a happy group that made their way back to Bethlehem that afternoon. But their hearts were too full to say much. One thing weighed upon my mother's heart; the thought that now her guests might leave our town and return to Nazareth. It seemed to her that here in the city of David, the appointed birthplace of the King, was the place for them to abide. So perhaps it

seemed also to Joseph and Mary. My mother ventured to ask her as we were entering the gate: 'You will not leave us now, will you?'

"'We are in God's hands,' Mary replied. 'Our whole duty is to this child, to rear him where God wills; to go or stay as He reveals, who has guided us hitherto.'

"'And it certainly was by His guidance that you came to our house, where you have been such a blessing. Stay with us.'

"'It is as God directs,' replied Mary.

"So, with nothing further said, they remained with us many days, sharing our home."

VI

"FOR more than a year the two little families thus lived together; the Child growing in beauty and loveliness, joined with an indescribable divine dignity, as if in his form dwelt the ideal glory of infancy; the mother growing also, if it were possible, in tender devotion and reverence. It was as if, from the first moment of his existence, the Child had become the King, the Lord, the Saviour.

"In all worldly affairs, however, the life of the household went on in very

humble and lowly ways. The husband, Joseph, who had brought with him a small bundle of carpenter's tools, worked as he could at his trade; and sometimes he accompanied my father to the pastures, where through the summer and early autumn the shepherds tended their flocks. As winter approached, and my father wished to remain out as long as he could before folding them again in the grotto, he built some sheepfolds in the fields, and Joseph helped him in constructing the mangers and the stalls. I have often heard my father speak of him as a man thoroughly just and gentle, always sweet and helpful, whose one care, like Mary's, was to guard and rear the wonderful Child,

and in all things to listen for the will of God.

"One evening, late in the second summer, as my father was with his shepherd mates in the field, they observed a strange new star over toward the east, which night by night grew brighter, as if it were coming steadily nearer; and finally it seemed to halt directly over Jerusalem, where it remained a little just over the palace, which, you know, is near the Jaffa gate. What it could portend was a matter of much curiosity to the shepherds; and my father, in whose heart the kingliness of his infant guest had become a firm conviction, wondered if now the Child were to be revealed to all Israel.

"The next day, leaving his flock with keepers, he remained at home; and as toward evening he was in the market-place, near the gate, he was surprised to see the star, now very near and bright, standing directly over his house. At the same time there entered the gate a train of camels, evidently from some distant land. They were richly caparisoned, and on them were seated riders who looked like men of great distinction. His surprise was not less as he saw that only the pack-camels halted at the inn, while three or four of the finest ones, with their riders, kept on through the narrow street in the direction of his house. Hastening home by another way, he arrived at his door just in time to see

them dismount, and to receive their courteous inquiry, 'Where is He—the King of the Jews?'

" 'The King of the Jews?' my father repeated, quite at loss how to answer.

" 'The newly born King,' the most venerable of them answered, correcting the first question. 'We have come from the far east to find him. For many days the star has been our guide, and we knew that the Great One whom we have long expected is born. While the star halted at Jerusalem, we sought King Herod, and he inquired of the scribes, who named this town. And lo, the star has pointed out this house.'

"Too full of astonishment to speak, my father conducted the men into the

chief room of the house, where sat Joseph and Mary and the Child. Seeing them, those richly clad men knelt with great reverence, and after the custom of their land offered homage as to a king; after which, opening their saddle-bags, they brought out costly presents, such as symbolize the reverence due to royalty. Then, as night was now falling, they departed, going back to the inn.

"It was all over in a few minutes, the strange foreign visitors going as abruptly as they had come. It left our little circle food for much wonder and inquiry. There in our humble dwelling they had rendered all the homage due to a king—nay, to more than king; for the offering they had

left, of gold and frankincense and myrrh, was full of mystic symbolism whose meaning could be surmised only dimly. And yet the visit was made quickly and almost furtively, as if it must be kept secret. To Joseph and my father it was a profound puzzle, though their hearts swelled with the thought that God was somehow revealing the greatness of the Child to far distant peoples, to men of good-will everywhere.

"As my father was starting for the sheep-range next morning, still turning over the mysterious event in his mind, he learned something more about it. In the courtyard of the inn was the whole troupe of camels with their drivers, getting ready for immediate

departure. The leader who had made inquiry, recognizing him as the householder of the evening before, told him who they were and why they were coming and going so privately. They were men of great learning and piety from far-away Chaldea, where the lore of the stars is deeply studied, as it were a book of revelation; and for more than a year this new star had been visible in their sky telling them of a wonderful new event. There are many of our race in Chaldea, as you know there are dispersed among all the lands; and from these Chaldean Jews have come many of our best teachings and prophecies, especially the prophecies of a coming King and kingdom wherein should be light and

law for all nations. Besides, a very ancient sage of their own, who dwelt by their great river when the Israelites were just entering to possess our land, speaking in their star language, had prophesied, 'There shall come forth a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel.' These men had taken their journey implicitly trusting the ancient hope and the beckoning star. On arriving at Jerusalem, expecting that all Palestine would be rejoicing over their new-born Monarch, they found instead that the aged Herod now on the throne knew nothing of him and had to get the traditions of the scribes to answer their inquiries. Further, they did not like the way he received them; his ful-

somely expressed desire to find the Child that he himself might do homage seemed to mask a treacherous design. They felt the falseness of the court atmosphere, as if they were regarded as revealing a secret dangerous to the state; and on coming forth from the poisoned audience they rejoiced the more in the pure ray of the star as it moved before them toward Bethlehem, telling them that after all their journey was not in vain. But they felt that they must move cautiously; hence their furtive visit to the Child, as unostentatious as it could be made. And now, their errand completed, instead of reporting themselves again to the king, they were preparing to take the Tekoa road to the Dead Sea shore and

so by a roundabout way to their home again. Their pious faith was satisfied; they knew their visit was of God and of sure revelation; but it pained them that they must come and go like spies.

"My father could not bear to stay in the field that day. He returned soon to his house, his mind troubled with a vague sense of danger. He thought of the old king in Jerusalem, a cruel old man whom his subjects detested; he recalled reports of his secret atrocities here and there in the land, of which men hardly dared speak for fear some evil would light on them. The shadow of some calamity to Bethlehem darkened his spirit; and it was with a pang of vague presage that he

entered his home again and saw the two mothers with their infants, so filled with happiness and wonder over the visit of the astrologers.

"He communicated to Joseph what he had learned of the foreigners; telling him also of their changed plans for returning home. Joseph received it gravely, saying, 'God will protect his own'; and soon withdrew to his chamber, where he betook himself to prayer."

VII

"SEVERAL days passed, and gradually my father's feeling of disquiet subsided. 'After all,' he argued with himself, 'what is there to fear from the chance visit of a company of star-gazers, who stopped at Jerusalem to inquire their way, and thus casually made their strange errand known in the palace?' So reason urged.

"He was soon to learn, however, in an event at which all the country-side around Bethlehem shuddered, that his first vague instinct of danger was all too true a premonition."

Obed's listeners bent forward with added intensity of interest. "Danger?" said the spokesman; "in that sequestered home—to that Heaven-sent Child? We know how his life was sought later, and how he was killed at last. Can it be that his peril began so early?"

"It would be incredible to me," replied Obed, "like a horrible dream when one awakes, were it not for the too real effects that it left."

"You speak of an event that was tragic for the country-side."

"Let me recount my story in order," said Obed. "It touched me too in a wonderful way, which I have never ceased to regard as God's special mercy."

"Pray excuse our interruption," said the listeners; "our amazement is to blame."

"The last evening of our guests' stay under our roof," Obed resumed, "was stamped indelibly, in every minute detail, on my parents' memory. The sun had set in extraordinary splendor, and our whole group had enjoyed the cool and calm of the oncoming twilight on the housetop, whence they could look toward the fields where nearly two years before the angels had sung, and where even now the flocks were folded. Not much was said, but the occasional remark revealed that while the two children were sleeping the four adults were thinking of the wonderful experience

in which they were sharers: my parents of the great blessing that their guests' companionship had brought to their home; our guests of their Heaven-appointed charge, and of the many tokens they had had of God's immediate care. So passed an hour or two of sweet reminiscence and peace. Little did any of them think it was their hour of farewell. Then, not late in the evening, all went below and separated for the night.

"About midnight my father awoke suddenly, aware of an unwonted noise in the small court on which our apartments opened. Stepping out to ascertain the cause he was surprised to find Joseph, with his beast all saddled, packing his belongings as if for a

journey; while the lamp shining from Mary's room apprised him that she too was similarly engaged.

"'What means this?' said my father, in agitation; for the sense of danger which had only been sleeping came upon him anew with redoubled force.

"'I was just about to rouse you and tell you,' said Joseph, in his usual gentle voice; 'it concerns you, I fear, as well as me.' Then he went on to relate how an angel had stood by him in a dream, and had bidden him depart at once and go to Egypt, there to remain until further directions were given him, 'for,' the angel had said, 'Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.'

"'To Egypt!' said my father, aghast; 'but have you friends there? have you supplies for the journey?'

"'There are many of our race in Egypt,' replied he, 'and my wife has kinsfolk at On. As for supplies,' he continued, 'there is the gold that the Wise Men left, an ample sum for our needs. You see how God has provided for us; be sure He forgets nothing.'

"'But to go so suddenly, in the dead of night,' said my father, 'what need of that?'

"'There is no time to lose,' replied Joseph; 'and God seems to have made this perfect moonlit night on purpose. It would not do, I feel sure, to be seen leaving Herod's dominions in

broad day.' And he went on to complete his simple preparations for the journey. My father, now fully aware of the need for haste, busied himself to help him. My mother, who also was awake and had been informed of the matter by Mary, was hastily preparing them store of food to last them till they could find some inn or friendly house on their way.

" 'But my dear friend,' said Joseph solemnly, laying his hand on my father's shoulder, 'you must not stay here. Herod's men will surely find the house where the Wise Men paid their homage, and your child is here, and his danger is as the danger of mine. Trouble not to help me; this very night you too must flee.'

"'Ah me,' said my father with a start of dismay, 'your warning is wise. God preserve my boy! Alas, where can I go?'

"'Go to your field,' said Joseph. 'How well it is that we have just finished your sheepfolds; God will give you refuge there.'

"Such was Joseph's helpful thoughtful way, on that night of haste and peril.

"By this time Mary had appeared, with the kingly Child in her arms, and after a few words of blessing and farewell the pair took their way through the silent streets, and took the southwestward road toward the Philistine land and the highway to Egypt.

"We could not stop to think of the sudden void that their departure had made in our home. That came afterward, and a sad enough gap opened between. Our preparations for flight were soon made. Having no beast of burden, my parents could take only what their hands could hold; so by the beginning of the last night watch we were safely housed in the new sheepfolds, and I was cradled in the manger that Joseph's hands had made.

"My father little dreamed, from Joseph's warning of the night before, to what fearful lengths King Herod's fury would go. The thought that a possible rival to his throne was born had maddened him; and to make sure of the child's destruction he had or-

dered the massacre of all the children two years old and under in the town and its neighborhood. And we had escaped none too soon. A shepherd —one of those who with my father had heard the angel's message— came out from the town that evening with a fearful tale to tell. A band of soldiers had marched in early in the day. At first their presence was not especially noticed; then it was seen that they were proceeding to make systematic visitation of every house, choosing no particular ones and sparing none; and soon agonized wails of women could be heard on every hand. In a short time it seemed as if the whole town were one cry of woe and despair; and to all the frantic

inquiries why the cold-blooded massacre of infants was made the only answer vouchsafed was, 'By order of the king.' All through the region they continued their search and butchery, going out even as far as the tomb of Rachel, near which several infants were slain. The shepherd had betaken himself to his sheep-range, almost unmanned by the sight and sound of the universal grief. He was surprised enough to find our family there in the sheep-fold, and me, their baby, safe with them.

"How my parents mourned with their neighbors over the woe that had overtaken our little town; how they reproached themselves as if some blame attached to them. My mother

never could dwell on that part of the tale. They had not dreamed that any house but theirs was in danger; theirs, they knew, was a marked house from the mysterious visit of the astrologers; and there in their sheep-fold, too late to give alarm, they found that through the foresight of their good guest Joseph theirs was the one house spared. It was with hearts depressed as well as thankful that they ventured back several days afterward to their home."

VIII

"MY mother did not tell me of this awful event, nor indeed of any of these things, until I was quite a lad—about twelve years old. My parents had been up to the Temple; it was the Passover season; and I had gone with them. That season, with our race, is always the occasion of reunion of friends and the renewal of old acquaintance, and my parents had planned to spend several days with some kinsfolk who lived over on the western hill, joining with them in the private Passover feast, and attending

the public services at their convenience.

"On the last day of the festival season we were together in the Women's court. I was much impressed with the splendors of the place and the gay crowds in the courts and porches; but I clung to my mother for fear of getting lost. The great ceremonials were about over, and many were getting ready to depart to their homes, when my mother unexpectedly met a woman of her acquaintance, whom she greeted fervently but with a certain marked reverence. She was a dark-eyed woman, with a wonderfully deep face and sweet gentle manner; evidently one of the common folk like us, but somehow seem-

ing above us like a saint. With her was her husband, a man considerably older than she, and two or three children. She and my mother were soon deep in reminiscence, from which I learned that they had known each other many years before, when I was an infant, but had not met since. I heard them speak of a midnight flight, of a residence in Egypt, from which the pair with their boy had returned not to Judea but to a town in the north, where they now lived.

"As the woman thus spoke of old times, she regarded me with peculiar interest; which I, a bashful village boy, could answer only with confused face.

"'And these are your children?'

said my mother. 'But where is he—the Child I knew?"

" 'Oh, he is somewhere here with our friends. There are many of us, neighbors and relatives, down from Galilee, and there is no lack of company.'

"That evening, in the place where we were visiting, as we sat on the house-top in the moonlight, my mother told me some things about the wonderful pair who with their baby had shared the shelter of our home; about the angels and the grotto; about the star and the Wise Men; about the sudden flight; and finally about the dreadful massacre which I alone had escaped. She told me also, in simple words, how ever since that time she

and my father had cherished the hope that the Child would some day be the King and Saviour of Israel, and how that hope had hallowed their whole life.

"I cannot express to you with what sacred awe and power her story, told in the moonlight of the holy feast, laid its grasp on my young heart. I have often thought since then that my mother had chosen with wonderful wisdom the time for telling it. At twelve years of age, you know, the children of our race are called 'sons of the law'; it is the time when their heritage of divine truth and promise is explained to them. And this was what my mother had laid up to impart to me; something in which my

own infancy had shared, and made all the more intimate by my meeting with Mary that day. The stately ceremonies I had seen had left me unmoved, except with childish wonder; but here it seemed as if God Himself had come very near to my own life, and in an act of special mercy. I had noticed as a child the strange lack of boy playmates of my age; here it was explained. They had gone, hapless innocents, to feed the rage of a cruel king; and I was the one survivor!

"Such, however, was only the first impression that my mother's story made upon me. To think that he of whom angels sang had actually shared his infancy with mine, had begun

from his very birth to be a Saviour to those who would receive him—that thought has stayed by me and deepened. In our sacred prophecies we have a very sweet name which we who love him apply in our hearts to him, 'Immanuel, God with us.' And it has been a fact of special significance to me that that name was prophesied of his infancy."

IX

"SO you did not see the Child himself, that day in the Temple?" said one of Obed's listeners, after a pause.

"No; it was many years before I saw him," replied Obed; "and then there were throngs of people about him, and I was merely one of the crowd."

"How I should like to hear something of his boyhood and youth," remarked one. "Do you not regret that he was not with his mother that day?"

"I had not heard the story then, you know," said Obed. "But there

was an interesting sequel to that chance meeting in the Temple, which as I recall it blends with the rest as if I had seen.

"It was, as I have said, the last great day of the Passover season when we met the Nazareth family in the Temple. Soon after we saw them they started with a group of their friends for their home. They did not trouble to find the Child, supposing that he had joined some other group and was already on the way. It was some time after noon, and they went as far as Bethel, where they put up for the night. Well on in the next day, however, not seeing him with any of their kinsfolk, they began to be anxious, and turned back to seek him

in Jerusalem. The mother was full of self-reproach, feeling that she had been too unmindful of the holy charge committed to her.

"As they reached the Temple again, only the ordinary crowds were in the courts, for the holiday companies had mostly dispersed, and they found nobody that they knew. It was only after three days that they found him, and then almost by accident. My mother had gone to the Temple that day, leaving me with the relatives with whom we were lodging; and there she found Joseph and Mary standing sadly near the entrance of one of the rooms where the teachers of the law hold their schools. They had just begun to tell her of their trouble, when two

of the doctors came out and passed them in animated conversation. 'The wonderful boy,' they heard one of them say; 'only a young son of the law, and yet how apt his answers!' 'And from Galilee too,' said the other; 'what can it mean?' Not stopping to hear more they hastened in, my mother with them; and there he was, in the midst, with a circle of the doctors round him. They were catechizing him, and with rapt face and glowing eyes he was answering, as if his soul were charged with some great truth to which he would bear witness; and they would shake their heads in mute wonder at the aptness and depth of his answers. It was as if teacher and taught had changed places.

"As soon as she could gain his attention Mary spoke, remonstrating with him for the anxiety he had caused them.

" 'How is it that ye sought me?' he asked, as if their own slowness of understanding were to blame; 'wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?'

"As soon as he had said this there came back into Mary's face, which had been clouded with vexation, that deep look of worship which my mother had so often seen when he was an infant in her home in Bethlehem. It was one of those moments when there pressed upon her heart the sense of his infinite distance beyond and above her.

THE MAN WITH THE PITCHER

"But with no word or sign of reluctance he arose and went with them."

X

OBED sat some time in silence, as if his story were told. His auditors too sat thoughtful and no longer inquisitive, as if their desire for information were gratified.

"A strange question," at length remarked one; "strange, or else full of high meaning. His father's business; but was not his father there in his very presence, and perhaps grieved at his heedlessness?"

"His Father in heaven he meant," replied Obed. "It was the first word I ever heard reported of him, but his

whole life was like that. To him God was as close and intimate a Being as our fathers are to us. His meat and his drink, as he once said, was to do his Father's will."

"And this conversance with God did not make him haughty and withdrawn—as it were a royal stranger to his family and neighbors?"

"Quite the contrary. From this wonderful meeting with the doctors he went with his parents home to Nazareth, lived with them until he was thirty years old, and was known to his neighbors as 'the carpenter.' And when in that same Nazareth home he told his fellow-townsmen of his mission in life, he spoke of healing and helping men, and of bringing

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good news and good cheer to the poor. That, he said, was what the spirit of his Father impelled him to."

"His Father's spirit—this then it was to be the Son of God?"

"Yes; not calling himself so but being so. What he called himself was merely the Son of Man, as if he would not set himself above us. Nay, more; he taught us all to say 'Our Father,' and always thus to pray, as if it were for us to be sons of God, and live and act in that assurance."

"How simple yet how uplifting it all is," said one of the auditors fervently. "Why, it is just as if God Himself had once dwelt with us."

"Yes; and dwells with us still," said Obed softly. "He brought us a

Father's love, and such love never fails, never leaves us."

"Not even though men spurn it, and nail the very Type of it to a cross? Can love stoop so low?"

"Its lowest was its highest. The Cross is the supreme pledge of its deathlessness," replied Obed. "That truth is our joy, our daily strength."

"Why, that is just what our Saint Paul has taught us," remarked one.

The party sat long silent, with a rapt sacred light in their eyes, more like worshipers than travelers. At length they rose to take their leave. Their leader spoke. "We came from our distant country to Jerusalem full of our nation's curiosity. We expected to hear of a high mysterious

personage, an austere sage apart from men and their affairs, whose mind none could understand except by some magic initiation as into our sacred Greek mysteries. We had heard fantastic tales of him too, absurd and uncouth, some told in spite and scorn, some in the extravagance of childish superstition; and we craved the plain truth of the matter. We have found far other, far more, than we sought or surmised; we have found,"—and here his voice sank to a whisper of awe—"Immanuel, God with us."